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AUTHOR Krokoff, Lowell Jay
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ABSTRACT

Most of the observational study of marriage has focused on relatively young and highly educated couples from professional backgrounds; working-class couples, older couples, and couples from distressed marriages seem reluctant to volunteer for research on close relationships. The development of techniques for recruiting these couples represents an important methodological problem that must be overcome in order to extend the observational study of marriage across social class and family life cycle dimensions. Satisfied and dissatisfied married couples (N=120 couples) from blue- and white-collar social classes were recruited for an observational study of marriage. A three-stage recruitment procedure was used which involved a random telephone survey of wives; letters to wives describing the nature of the study; and, finally, home visits which involved both husbands and wives and which focused on subjects' apprehensions about the research. Couples who were still apprehensive following the home visit were given the opportunity to sample the first part of the study, the oral history interview. Financial incentives, and researcher persistence and willingness to accommodate subjects were also used in recruitment. No statistically meaningful sampling biases were found due to the differential dropout of couples throughout the recruitment process. (NRB)

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# ASSESSMENT AS A PROCEDURE FOR RECRUITING REPRESENTATIVE MARITAL SAMPLES

Lowell Jay Krokoff

Texas A&M University

Paper presented at the annual meeting of the National Council on Family Relations, San Francisco, October 1984.

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TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)."

# ASSESSMENT AS A PROCEDURE FOR RECRUITING REPRESENTATIVE MARITAL SAMPLES

Lowell Jay Krokoff

Texas A&M University

The last 12 years has witnessed major technological and methodological breakthroughs in the observational study of marriage; for example, the development of reliable methods for coding problem-solving and nonverbal communication (e.g., The Couple's Interaction Scoring System, Gottman, 1979; The Marital Interaction Coding System, Hops, Wills, Patterson, & Weiss, 1972), and the application of sequential analysis and time-series methods to the statistical analysis of observational data (e.g., Gottman, 1979, 1981; Notarius, Krokoff, & Markman, 1982). These developments have increased the precision with which researchers are able to assess communication in marriage. The major contribution of observational methods to our understanding of marital relationships has been to identify the specific interaction sequences that differentiate well-functioning marriages from those that are not. In particular, this research has led to a model of communication in well-functioning marriages that focuses on the way spouses express their feelings about problems and reach a consensus (Krokoff & Gottman, 1983). The influence of this research is reflected in the growing numbers of marital therapies, enrichment workshops, and self-help books whose aim it is to teach couples more effective strategies for communicating about their disagreements.

These contributions not withstanding, there remains the possibility that observational research has managed to portray what interactions are like in only one type of well-functioning marriage. In reviewing the observational

literature I was struck by the fact that most of this research has been conducted with relatively young, highly educated couples from professional backgrounds. Marital researchers have long speculated that these are the very types of couples who are most likely to evaluate their marital happiness in terms of the quality of their conversations (e.g., Hawkins, Weisberg, & Ray, 1977; Hill, Rubin, Peplau, & Willard, 1979; Kirby & Davis, 1972). Currently, we know very little about the generality of observational research to couples whose marital philosophies have been exposed to a different array of socioeconomic conditions and secular trends.

A major reason for this current state of affairs (in the observational field) is that both working-class couples and older couples are reluctant to volunteer for research on close relationships (e.g., Hawkins et al., 1977; Hill et al., 1979; Kirby & Davis, 1972), especially those studies that employ videotaping techniques. The development of techniques for recruiting these couples, therefore, represents an important methodological problem that must be overcome if we are to extend the observational study of marriage across social class and family life cycle dimensions.

Observational research also has trouble recruiting couples from distressed marriages. As a result many researchers (e.g., Gottman, Markman, & Notarius, 1977; Gottman, Notarius, Markman, Bank, Yoppi, & Rubin, 1976) are forced to combine distressed couples who were recruited with different procedures (e.g., therapy referrals, newspaper advertisements, offering counseling or communication workshops)--sometimes even from different cities (e.g., Margolin & Wampold, 1981)--into the same distressed group. Another approach is to recruit couples from among the ranks of those currently in marital therapy. In fact, many researchers now offer some form of marital counseling as a recruitment

incentive (e.g., Gottman, 1979). However, there is some evidence that marital counseling has greater appeal for communication oriented couples from nontraditional marriages (Kressel & Slipp, 1975), so it is possible that this strategy may solve one recruitment problem, while adding to the other.

I therefore decided to design an observational study that employed random sampling techniques to recruit couples, and that sampled from both happily and unhappily married couples in both blue-collar and white-collar occupations. This research was conducted in collaboration with John Gottman at the University of Illinois. Today's talk represents an interim report on the status of this project. In particular, I will describe the methods that were employed to recruit couples for this project. I will also present the results of a study that assessed the differential characteristics of research participants.

## METHOD AND RESULTS

The design of the observational study called for a large sample of 120 couples divided into a 2 x 2 factorial design, with two levels of social class, blue-collar and white-collar, and two levels of marital satisfaction, satisfied and dissatisfied. There were four parts to this study: an oral history interview (3 hours), videotaping in the laboratory (1 hour), audiotaping in the home (1 hour), and filling out a battery of questionnaires (2 hours). Each couple received $100 for their time, which represented a subject fee of about $7 per hour per spouse.

The 120 couples were recruited with a three stage procedure. The first stage involved a random telephone survey of married households in the twin cities of Champaign and Urbana, Illinois. The interviews were conducted by the Survey Research Laboratory at the University of Illinois and the Illini Marketing Research Company (Urbana, IL). Table 1 presents a description of the

specific measurement of every variable (i.e., marital satisfaction, socioeconomic status and family demographics) in the telephone survey. Respondents who were eligible for the telephone interviews were defined as wives from intact marriages in which neither spouse was a full-time student. The decision to survey only wives was based on a recommendation found in Lillian Rubin's (1976) book, Worlds of Pain. Rubin found that the key to recruiting working-class couples was to first obtain the cooperation of the wives who then help get their husbands to participate.

I was very pleased that approximately ninety percent of the eligible respondents completed the telephone interviews. Overall, the telephone survey yielded a large sample of 873 married couples varying widely in marital satisfaction (Locke-Wallace MAT: M = 121.96, SD = 21.83, range = 11-158), socioeconomic status (e.g., wife education: M = 13.51 yrs., SD = 2.72, range = 3-18; husband education: M = 14.13 yrs, SD = 3.10, range = 2-18), and family demographics (e.g., wife age: M = 44.72 yrs, SD = 15.24, range = 14-91; husband age: M = 47.37, SD = 15.64, range = 21-93; number of years married: M = 19.82, SD = 14.41, range = <1-69). Furthermore, the information obtained in the telephone survey allowed for a systematic assessment of the differential drop out of couples at later stages in the recruitment process.

In the second stage of recruitment, the information from the telephone survey was used to identify those couples who met the social class and marital satisfaction criteria for the observational study[1]. Letters describing the nature of the study were then mailed to the wives in these households, which was in keeping with the goal of focusing on the wives in the initial stages of recruitment. This was also consistent with Hill et al's (1979) finding that men are less likely than women to respond to recruitment mailings for research on

close relationships. Those wives who were interested in hearing more about the project were instructed to return the prestamped postcard that accompanied the recruitment letter. A second letter was sent to those wives who did not respond within two weeks of the first mailing.

A relatively high rate of cooperation was obtained, as nearly two thirds of the wives returned the postcards. I use the term "relatively high" since recruitment mailings in this field typically yield return rates in the range of forty to fifty percent (e.g., Hill et al., 1979; Vincent, 1964). The information from the telephone survey also allowed for a systematic assessment of any differences between those households in which the wives expressed interest in the study and those in which they did not. These assessments were made with univariate analysis of variance (in the case of the continuous measures from the telephone survey), and with chi-square analysis (in the case of the dichotomous measures). The results of these analyses are presented in Table 2 (Stage II). As Table 2 reveals, there were no statistically significant differences ($p < .05$) between the interested and noninterested households for the measures of marital satisfaction, socioeconomic status, and family demographics such as the amount of time respondents knew their spouses before marriage and the number of children in their families.

Statistically significant effects ($p < .001$) were found for the life-cycle variables, as spouses in noninterested households were older and married longer than those in the interested households (Table 2). However, the magnitudes of these effects were very small, accounting for only 2.7% of the variance for the length of marriage variable, 4.9% for the husband age variable, and 5.4% for the wife age variable. Overall, the recruitment mailings yielded a large pool of 259 interested couples who varied widely in age and length of marriage. For

example, the mean age of husbands was 45 years, with a range of 21-93 years; the mean age of the wives was 42 years, with a range of 19-81 years; the mean number of years married was 18 years with a range of less than 1-69 years. Considering that most observational research has been carried out with couples in their early-to-late twenties who have been married less than ten years (see Markman, Notarius, Stephen, & Smith, 1981), the sample of interested households recruited in the present study represented a significant improvement along these dimensions.

The goal of the third stage of recruitment was to obtain, from the pool of interested wives, the 120 couples needed for the observational study of marriage. At this point in the recruitment process home visits were used to describe the project and to encourage the participation of interested couples. It was at this time that the husbands were brought into the recruitment process.

As it turned out, the home visits were very helpful for both learning about--and overcoming--people's apprehensions about the research. Most noteworthy in this regard were those concerns expressed by many of the working-class and maritally dissatisfied couples. Both felt they had little to contribute, the blue-collar couples cited their lack of education, and the maritally dissatisfied cited their own difficulties in marriage. There was also some apprehension on the part of the older couples who had little contact with the university community.

Therefore, those couples who were still apprehensive about the study were given the opportunity to sample the first part of the study before making up their minds. This involved taking part in the oral history interview. The oral history interview was based on Studs Terkel's (see Terkel, 1970, 1972) approach

to getting people to feel comfortable talking about themselves. With this technique the interviewer essentially enlists the couple's help--almost as if they were co-experimenters--in assessing the history and philosophy of the couple's marriage. I have found that all but the most severely distressed couples find this to be a rewarding experience.

Overall, cooperation was quite good in the third stage of recruitment, as nearly seventy percent of the interested couples who were contacted and still eligible (i.e., the couple had neither moved from town nor undergone a change in marital status since the telephone survey) completed the observational study. Once again the information from the telephone survey was used to assess the differential drop-out of couples. Table 2 (Stage III) presents the results of the univariate and chi-square analyses for any differences between the interested couples who participated in the study and those who refused. This time, no statistically significant differences were found ($p < .05$) for any of the measures, including the life-cycle measures.

In the majority of nonparticipant households the wife had wanted to participate but the husband refused. Therefore, in order to obtain additional information about these marriages the wives were asked to fill out a battery of marital questionnaires, which were also completed by the wives who later participated in the study[2]. The results of univariate analyses of variance revealed little or no statistically significant differences ($p < .05$) between the participant and nonparticipant households for the wives' expectations for communication in marriage (participants: $M = 111.58$; nonparticipants: $M = 108.33$; $F(1,174) = 2.35$), their (wives') ratings of how much their husbands help with housework--which was used as an index of traditionality in marital roles (participants: $M = 116.38$, nonparticipants: $M = 117.26$; $F(1,174) = .03$), their

ratings of negative affect escalation in their marriages (participants: $M$ = 153.67; nonparticipants: $M$ = 145.72; $F(1,174) = 2.78$), and the wives' ratings of their husbands' emotional expressiveness and responsiveness (participants: $M$ = 121.01; nonparticipants: $M$ = 109.05; $F(1,174) = 10.19$, $p < .002$). (Although the latter analysis of variance for the expressiveness-responsiveness dimension was statistically significant the magnitude of this relationship was very small, accounting for only 5.5% of the variance).

I will now summarize the findings presented here today and discuss their implications.

## DISCUSSION

In summary, I have described a three-stage procedure for recruiting couples for observational research. This procedure employed random telephone interviews, recruitment mailings, home visits, oral history interviews, and financial incentives. The recruitment procedures were also combined with a relentless spirit that was reminiscent of the pioneering sociological studies in the marital field (e.g., Locke, 1951). Researchers like Harvey Locke were willing to do almost anything, go almost anywhere, in order to enlist the cooperation of subjects. A similar approach characterized the present study. Interviews were scheduled at the complete convenience of the research participants, some interviews were done on the weekends, some late at night. Two couples completed the study after moving away from town, one as far away as Cincinnati. One interview was conducted in a hospital room, with the interviewer and wife sitting at opposite sides of the husband's bed. Experimenters baby sat, provided transportation and picked up materials from the couples' homes. On one occasion I accompanied the interviewer to a ghetto home and sat with the husband--who was drunk and threatening the interviewer--until

he was sober enough to do the interview.

These efforts--along with the other procedures described today--paid off. At each stage of recruitment relatively high cooperation rates were obtained. Furtnermore, this study found no statistically meaningful sampling biases due to the differential drop-out of couples throughout the recruitment process. The net yield of recruitment was a large sample of 120 couples divided among the maritally satisfied and dissatisfied from both social classes. (Due to oversampling, 122 couples eventually participated in the observational study). The sample also represented couples from the full spectrum of the family life cycle (husband age: M = 43.76 years, SD = 14.33, range = 21-78; wife age: M = 41.40, SD = 13.85, range = 21-76; years married: M = 17.76, SD = 14.00, range = <1-54).

The results of the work presented here today have important implications for the observational study of marriage. Low rates of participation among both working-class couples and older couples have resulted in a taxonomy of marital interaction based almost exclusively on observations of relatively young and highly educated couples from professional backgrounds. If--as some have argued (e.g., Kirby & Davis, 1972; Rubin, 1976)--the current emphasis on communication in close relationships is a relatively recent secular trend associated with a high level of education and occupational status, then this taxonomy may represent only a partial view of marriage. The sample of couples recruited in this study therefore provides an excellent opportunity for assessing the generality of observational research (e.g., see Krokoff, 1984).

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Footnotes

1. Marital satisfaction was assessed using the standard Locke-Wallace MAT (Locke & Wallace, 1959) cut-off score of 100. Designations of blue-collar/ white-collar status were based on the standard practice of combining the managerial and technical occupational categories on the U.S. Bureau of the Census (1980) Occupational Classification System into the white-collar group, and combining the remaining categories (service, craft, farming, and operators) into the blue-collar group.

2. Seventy-nine percent of the wives from the nonparticipant households filled out the questionnaires. Furthermore, there were no statistically significant ($p < .05$) differences between nonparticipant households in which the wives filled out the questionnaires ("nonparticipants-questionnaires") and those nonparticipant households in which they refused ("nonparticipants-questionnaire refusals") along any of the measures obtained in the telephone survey; e.g., Lock-Wallace MAT: nonparticipants-questionnaires, $M = 124.94$, $SD = 27.62$; nonparticipants-questionnaire refusals, $M = 109.33$, $SD = 34.57$, $F(1,70) = 2.73$; years married: nonparticipants-questionnaires, $M = 21.38$, $SD = 17.67$, nonparticipants-questionnaire refusals, $M = 16.98$, $SD = 13.24$, $F(1,71) = 1.18$; Duncan Socioeconomic Index of Occupational Prestige: nonparticipants-questionnaires wives, $M = 38.69$, $SD = 23.06$, nonparticipants-questionnaire refusals, $M = 46.54$, $SD = 27.10$, $F(1,71) = 1.12$.

TABLE 1. THE SPECIFIC MEASUREMENT OF EVERY VARIABLE IN THE TELEPHONE SURVEY

| VARIABLE | MEASUREMENT |
|---|---|
| MARITAL SATISFACTION | Wives' scores on the Locke-Wallace Marital Adjustment Test (Locke & Wallace, 1959), suitably modified for telephone administration. |
| SOCIOECONOMIC STATUS | |
| Education | Number of years of education completed by both the respondent and her husband. |
| Income | Total household income for the year preceding the telephone survey: (a) less than $10,000, (b) $10,001-$20,000, (c) $20,001-$30,000, or (d) more than $30,000. |
| Occupational Prestige | Main wage earner's score on Duncan's (1961) Socioeconomic Index. |
| Occupational Category | Category of the main wage earner's occupation on the U.S. Bureau of the Census (1980) Occupational Classification System: (a) Managerial, etc., (b) Technical, etc., (c) Service, (d) Farming, etc., (e) Craft, etc., or (f) Operators, etc. |
| Blue-collar/White-collar status | Based on the standard practice of combining the above Managerial and Technical Census codes into the white-collar group, and the remaining categories (Service, Craft, Farming, & Operators) into the blue-collar group. |
| FAMILY DEMOGRAPHICS | |
| Age | The age (in years) of both the respondent and her husband. |
| Length of Marriage | Number of years respondent had been married to her current spouse. |
| Premarital Acquaintance | Number of months the respondent knew her current spouse before marriage. |
| Children | Number of children in the respondent's family. |

TABLE 2. THE RESULTS OF THE UNIVARIATE ANALYSES OF VARIANCE AND CHI-SQUARE ANALYSES FOR DIFFERENCES BETWEEN THE INTERESTED AND NONINTERESTED HOUSEHOLDS, AND THE PARTICIPANT AND NONPARTICIPANT HOUSEHOLDS.

| VARIABLE | Stage II Interested vs. Noninterested | Stage III Participants vs Nonparticipants |
|---|---|---|
| MARITAL SATISFACTION | $F(1,405) = 3.00$ | $F(1,191) = 1.84$ |
| SOCIOECONOMIC STATUS | | |
| Wife Education | $F(1,408) = 2.18$ | $F(1,193) = 0.01$ |
| Husband Education | $F(1,405) = 2.29$ | $F(1,192) = 0.01$ |
| Occupational Prestige | $F(1,406) = 0.04$ | $F(1,192) = 0.23$ |
| Occupational Group | $X^2(5, N = 410) = 2.54$ | $X^2(5, N = 195) = 7.00$ |
| Blue/White-collar status | $X^2CORR(1, N = 410) = 0.08$ | $X^2CORR(1, N = 195) = 0.18$ |
| Income | $X^2(3, N = 337) = 5.47$ | $X^2(3, N = 167) = 0.88$ |
| FAMILY DEMOGRAPHICS | | |
| Premarital Acquaintance | $F(1,404) = 0.04$ | $F(1,191) = 0.43$ |
| Years Married | $F(1,406) = 11.21***$ | $F(1,192) = 0.03$ |
| Wife Age | $F(1,407) = 23.30***$ | $F(1,193) = 2.39$ |
| Husband Age | $F(1,405) = 20.76***$ | $F(1,192) = 2.57$ |
| Children | $F(1,407) = 0.02$ | $F(1,193) = 0.45$ |

$***p < .001$

Note: None of the other analyses presented in this table were statistically significant at $p < .05$.